

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 003043

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ARPI AND NEA/PI

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SUBJECT: UAE DEMOCRATIC REFORM STRATEGY: QUARTERLY

PROGRESS REPORT

REF: A) ABU DHABI 2173 B) ABU DHABI 2945 C) ABU DHABI 2946 D) ABU DHABI 2947

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

**11.** (C) Summary: Since the May 16 submission of the UAE democratic reform strategy (ref A), visiting DOS and embassy officials have highlighted the need for greater public participation with President Khalifa, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, MinState Foreign Affairs Hamdan bin Zayed, Al Ain's Sheikh Tahnoon as well as with civil society interlocutors. In addition, we are working through MEPI to support drafting of a new media law. We have also raised transparency issues with senior UAEG officials and noted greater UAEG emphasis on information outreach with regard to the census and FTA. We have made inroads in discussing training opportunities for public prosecutors and other legal professionals. Nonetheless, the pace of political reform in UAE remains modest. End summary.

**12. (C) Representative Government:**

The visit of NEA PDAS Liz Cheney to the UAE June 25-27 presented an opportunity for the embassy to engage the senior UAE leadership in discussions of political reform. Cheney discussed reform with the President of the UAE Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed, Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed, Minister of Education Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, and Minister of Labor Dr. Al Kaabi. Cheney also met Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed and Minister of Information Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed during a July 1 meeting in Paris and raised reform themes. During the meetings, Cheney emphasized that to fully empower its citizens, the UAE Government needed to guarantee political freedom and democracy, and also boost economic development. She encouraged the Emiratis to pursue political, educational and social reform. Sheikh Hamdan told Cheney that the UAE leadership was committed to political reform, but would need time to increase public awareness about the coming changes. Cheney said the U.S. understood that each country would move at its own pace, but stressed the importance of moving. Ambassador also met July 9 with the Ruler's Representative to the Eastern Region of Abu Dhabi Emirate, Sheikh Tahnoon bin Mohammed Al Nahyan, to discuss political reform in the UAE, among other topics. Sheikh Tahnoon assured Ambassador that representative government and elections "were coming" to the UAE, but declined to set a timeline.

**13. (SBU) Civil Society Development:** During the visit of PDAS Cheney, Ambassador hosted a dinner for 12 prominent Emirati civil society leaders, including NGO activists, women's group activists, academics, business reps, and media.

Discussion ranged from benefits of the FTA to women's development. Some interlocutors said Emiratis needed to be educated about their civic responsibilities before trying to push for a democratically elected government. Addressing USG efforts to encourage political reform in the UAE, President of the UAE Businesswomen's Association Raja Al Gurg and others expressed concerns about "trying to run before they could walk." They said citizens need to understand the responsibilities that go with democracy before participating in elections, or else a corrupt or pandering government would be elected. Cheney responded that the USG considered elections a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy, and she fully supported efforts at building civil society and institutions associated with public participation in government. Noting that the President had admitted the USG's error in supporting "stability over democracy" in its relations with the Arab world for the past 60 years, Cheney told the guests that this was no longer the case.

**14. (U)** In addition, human rights activists Dr. Khalifa Bakhit Al Falasi and Dr. Ebtisam Al Kitbi have recently informed us of their hopes that the UAEG will authorize the country's first-ever human rights association before the end of the year. Al Falasi and Al Kitbi are part of a group of about 30 activists who would form the backbone of the new association. Both said the UAE needs a domestic human rights monitoring organization that can complement the work of the State Department. The UAEG is also studying whether to authorize a second human rights association that has a

moderate Islamic leadership. Al Falasi and Al Kitbi note that the UAE's Associations Law stipulates that the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has a month from the date of application to recognize and clear an application, but a decision is months overdue. We will continue to raise this issue with UAEG interlocutors.

**15. (SBU) Media Reform:**

At embassy's request, MEPI has offered to fund a U.S. media-related legal expert to provide the UAE Journalists Association with assistance in drafting recommendations to the UAEG for the draft of a new media law. PA staff met with the head of the Journalists Association to explain how this proposal can help the Association to compare media-related laws from other countries and to draft or review language for submission to Ministry of Information. The Journalists Association will accept offer and MEPI is moving forward to identify appropriate media-related law expert. In addition, the May workshop for Arab Female Journalists brought together 22 journalists and educators for a three-day training program. The workshop introduced participants to strategies for effective use of the internet and how to use technology such as blogging to break the social and cultural barriers which have impeded the progress of women.

**16. (SBU) Transparency:**

Ambassador raised the issue of government transparency with Hafsa Al Ulama, the UAE's lead on its national census and Assistant U/S at the Ministry of Economy on July 5. Al Ulama noted that the Ministry has created an independent website that will post information about the census and results, once the data are available. She also said that the Ministry has established a hotline for people to call to find out information about the census. Recognizing that many expatriate workers do not speak English or Arabic, the hotline messages are in Hindi, Malayalam, Arabic, and English. Ambassador noted the value of such transparency and public outreach in the UAEG decision-making and policymaking process.

**17. (SBU) The UAEG has also been actively engaging in high-level outreach to the press and UAE business community on the benefits of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States in an effort to ensure that the public is more informed about both the benefits of an FTA and progress on the negotiations.** Minister of Economy and Planning Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi and Minister of State for Finance and Industry Dr. Mohammed Khalfan bin Khirbush (the co-chairs of the UAE FTA negotiating team) have both issued prominent press releases in May and June lauding the expected economic benefits the UAE would experience from an U.S./UAE FTA, and they have held meetings with key private-sector stakeholders to garner their support for an FTA with the United States. Sheikha Lubna and Dr. Khirbush also held a Digital Video Conference on June 27 with USTR to review progress of the negotiating subgroups since the conclusion of the second round of negotiations in early May. The teams discussed the Market Access, IPR, Telecom, Services, Financial Services, and Investment chapters, and both sides agreed that the DVC served as a catalyst to further move the negotiations closer to closure. It concluded with the commitment to hold a third in-person round either end of September or early October.

**18. (SBU) Long Term Effort -- Justice Reform:**

Resident Legal Advisor has met with the Abu Dhabi Attorney General, representatives from the Dubai Public Prosecutor's Office, officials in the Ministry of Interior, and Central Bank to discuss training opportunities.  
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